File 343
acc. 2247

Linguistic Reflections on a Newari Text

Austin Hale

March 24, 1989

For my personal pleasure and benefit, as well as for the stimulation of a few friends of mine who are also interested in gaining a better understanding of Newari, I have begun to put on paper some reflections on the discourse structure of certain short published Newari texts. On seeing one of these, an esteemed Newar friend of mine suggested that I offer it for publication in Newari. While I found this encouraging, I realize that in writing on the linguistic stucture of Newari I am drawing not only upon things I have learned from distinguished Newar scholars over the past two decades, but also upon an almost limitless fund of ignorance about the language and culture. I only hope that in exposing these reflections in this way other linguists may be stimulated to deeper insights in their efforts to put the record straight.

The texts I select for linguistic study are simply those that I enjoy, entirely apart from what I am interested in as a linguist. I look for texts that appeal to me as a human being. I realize that what appeals to me as a cultural outsider may not be a very rigorous standard of excellence. I have not as yet read very widely, so my selections should be viewed to some extent as accidental. But perhaps one can be forgiven for admiring a flower even though he does not understand it perfectly, and even though he may not yet be able to distinguish a dandelion from a rose.

1. The Point of these Reflections

What inspires these reflections is an uneasiness that I have had with linguistic descriptions of Newari that argue from isolated sentences. Newar language consultants which whom I have worked often reject the kinds of examples most sorely needed by linguists to argue a point. Often the points are correct even though the examples which are offered in support of them are rejected by native speakers.

with

What drives this study is the conviction that the study of sentences in the context of a coherent text is likely to yield far more linguistic insight than the study of isolated sentences. There is no such thing as a truly independent sentence. Every sentence depends upon some context if it is to serve a communicative purpose. The object of this little study is to illustrate some of the ways in which the structure of a sentence interacts with the structure of a discourse. Given an appealing text, how can the structural basis for the aesthetic experience provided by that text be made explicit in linguistic terms?

2. Regarding Author Intent: A Confession

I should perhaps confess to a rather unfashionable view of written prose. Following Hirsch and Pike, I assume that when an author writes prose in any language he does so in order to communicate with his readers. I am assuming that it makes sense to inquire as to the intent of the author, and that the intent of the author is crucially relevant to an understanding of the prose piece. My assumptions contrast, then, with the more fashionable view currently held by many literary critics to the effect that once the author has finished with his writing, his original intent is no longer relevant to an understanding or an analysis of the text. The author only wrote it, who is he to interpret it? While

this note is no place to debate this issue, I would like to quote the most compressed and compelling statement I have yet seen regarding the nature of literary communication, a set of two short poems by Kenneth L. Pike which appeared in PRE TEXT An Interdisciplinary Journal of Rhetoric, Vol 7, Nos. 1-2, Spring/Summer 1986, page 107:

Inkblot Poetry -- A Query

"Me, trying to say something?"
"Oh, no -- you're just the author.
Someone else must say
What's said . . . Right?"
(Author's rights are
Semantically bankrupt
Faced by interpretive
Staked-out claims
Affirming that poems
Are pretty inkblots
Awaiting reader's
Dreamy impositions! . . .
But reader "re-write" rights? . . .
"And when you are
Saying I said --
Are you then 'saying'?"
"No, just throwing words
At other unhearing wordless 'things'."

Kenneth L. Pike

Collage -- A Reply

"And what did you mean? --
I don't know,
And you didn't say.
Why won't you? --
Don't you know? --
"I like relations --
Patterns, not logic --
Feelings, not thoughts --
Any words will do.
"Just let them collide
In collage. It'll
Bundle them up.
"Don't get cross with me --
Cross-word puzzles can be fun! --
"For us elite."

Kenneth L. Pike

On the one hand (*Inkblot Poetry -- A Query*) the author must be allowed to say what he means, and there must always be the option of believing that an author did, in fact have a clear intent, did have something to say and that his intent is relevant to the interpretation and analysis of the text. On the other hand (*Collage -- A Reply*) the author must be free to refuse to say what he means, to write without cognitive intent, to play games of any sort for an audience (the elite) who derive pleasure from such things, and there must always be the possibility that an analytic approach which depends upon making explicit statements regarding author's intent will prove fruitless for this class of texts. I am assuming that the piece we will be looking at belongs to the class of texts for which it is fruitful to form hypotheses regarding author's intent.

3. The Text

The text considered here is the third in a set of five "free stories" by Keda:r 'Situ', which appeared in *Kheluitaa:* for 1108, Nepal Sambat, pages 9 and 10. In attempting to come to an understanding of this text I have been privileged to spend some time with the author, and wish to acknowledge his insightful comments not only as author, but also as an experienced writer and editor. [To the text I have added line numbers for ease of reference, and in my English draft I had added a line of morpheme glosses and a line of phrase glosses in English as well as an information-type classification for each sentence.]

libhing sTa:eNDarD
Living Standard
Keda:r 'Situ'

1)	*50/60 la:kh*	*tukaa:*	*wAA*	*chE*	*dana.*	EVENT
	50/60 hundred thousand	cost,CAUSE,NONFINAL	he,ERG	house	build,PD	
	Spending 5 or 6 million		he built a house.			
2)	*wa chEE*	*wAA*	*thaa cwaneta*	*la:yak*	*mata:la.*	COLLATERAL
	that house,in	he,ERG	self live,FC,PUR	suitable	NEG,feel,PD	
	In that house	he	to live himself	didn't feel appropriate		
3)	*chE chakhAA:*	*bideshiitaeta*	*ba:lAA*	*bila.*		EVENT
	that house,CL,EMP	foreigner,PL,DAT	rented quarters	give,PD		
	The whole house	to foreigners	he rented.			
4)	*thaa chakuu kwatha:*	*ba:lAA*	*kayaa:*	*cwAAwana.*		EVENT
	self one,CL room	rented quarters	take,NONFINAL	stay,ST,go,PD		
	he himself one room	taking as rented quarters		went to live		

Assuming that it does represent communication and not just pretty inkblots waiting for the reader's dreamy impositions, this piece invites a reading and makes the implicit claim that something of significance is to be said. When the implicit claim to significance comes intuitively clear to the reader early on, perhaps even as early as the title, and the claim is fulfilled by the end of the reading, then the tacit contract between writer and reader is satisfied, and the credibility of the

author with respect to his implicit claim is supported.

As I read it, this text is a parable. The same individual is actor throughout and that individual is central to the parable. In more technical terms this is a *participant-oriented narrative* in the sense that the significance of the text depends not upon the impact of the plot, but depends rather upon the impact of what is said about the participants. In essence it is an ironic commentary on the actor. The impression that something significant is being said is built not upon the plot but upon characterization of the main participant and upon the unstated implications that the characterization points to.

Success in building impact within such a parable depends upon the author's skill in characterizing the main actor, using just the right information to give us the ironic jolt he intends. A man is held up for public examination on the basis of his behavior. The response that this skillful piece elicits is, I would guess, 'How odd!' If there were a moral it might be that greed deprives us of any enjoyment we might have gotten from things we build.

Since I have claimed that there are no really independent sentences in discourse, I will attempt to discuss each sentence in the light of the rest of the text.

4. Sentence 1

4.1 *Word-Order in the Text-Initial Sentence*

1) 50/60 la:kh tukaa: wAA chE dana. 'Spending five or six million he built a house.'

The initial sentence of a text often performs a number of different tasks. Here it introduces the main character and narrates the first close-knit sequence of events. The focal point of the initial sentence is the first clause, 50/60 la:kh tukaa:. Placing this clause in prominence with no overt reference to either the house or the main actor provides an initial clue that what follows will not turn out to be a conventional narrative told primarily for the sake of its event line. Set in this way the reader is impressed by the fact that the actor is wealthy. The clause provides the reader with an initial characterization of the actor. This seems to be quite an effective way of introducing a participant-oriented narrative.

When looking at a sentence in a specific context, one is often struck by the fact that if one were to ignore the context, much the same thing could be said in many different ways, but that within this context, one particular form seems to work best. Kenneth and Evelyn Pike have exploited this phenomenon extensively in their work on experimental syntax and I have benefitted from their work even though what I do here may not closely resemble anything they have done.

Suppose we look at Sentence (1) in this way. Apart from this context it could have read in various ways, even without changing the words or the relative ordering of the two clauses:

1a. wAA 50/60 la:kh tukaa: chE dana.
1b. wAA chE 50/60 la:kh tukaa: dana.
1c. chE wAA 50/60 la:kh tukaa: dana.

1d. 50'60 la:kh tukaa: chE wAA dana.

If the text had started with Sentence (1a) instead of with Sentence (1), wAA would have been in focus as an actor, and 50/60 la:kh tukaa:, would have been understood primarily as something the actor did, rather than as a characterization of the actor. This would have been an effective way to begin an event-oriented narrative, but for this text the expectations raised by casting the sentence in this form are not fulfilled.

The position that immediately precedes the verb often has the special function of highlighting the item referred to in that position. The relatively free word order in Newari sentences, makes the preverb position an important one for the understanding of Newari discourse.

In an attempt to construct a sentence in which chE occurred in immediate pre-verbal position within the initial clause I proposed the sentence,

1*. wAA 50/60 la:kh chE tukaa: dana.

This was viewed as an unacceptable sentence in its own right, and thus one that would not come in question as a potential substitute for Sentence (1). Apparently 50/60 la:kh is a complement, closely tied to the underlying verb, tu 'cost', and thus counts as part of the verb. If this is the case, Sentence (1b) is then the correct version of the example I had tried to construct -- a sentence with chE in immediate pre-verbal position within the initial, non-final clause.

1b. wAA chE 50/60 la:kh tukaa: dana.

What, then, is the effect of placing chE in prominence in this way? The effect seems to be that of introducing chE as a primary topic for further development within the discourse. In this case it leads the reader to expect that the following sentences would be talking mainly about the house. This expectation could lead the reader to misinterpret Sentences (2) and (3), since these sentences are primarily about the actor, not the house, and to interpret Sentence (4), which carries the punch line, as irrelevant, since it makes no mention of the house at all. Replacing Sentence (1) with Sentence (1b), then, could substantially reduce the impact of this delightful little parable.

1c. chE wAA 50/60 la:kh tukaa: dana.

Sentence (1c) was proposed and rejected as a possible text-initial sentence, at least in normal prose. Presumably it could find some text-initial use in poetic language. For this to be a natural sentence in prose, it would have to be preceded by something that would allow chE to occupy the focal or thematic sentence-initial position. As an illustration the following context was offered:

wAA chE danegu gwasaa: gwala.	He planned to build a house.
waya:ke dheba: madu.	He didn't have the money.
aesAA:	In spite of that, however,
chE (wAA) 50/60 la:kh tukaa: dana.	he spent 5 to 6 million and built a house

In this example, chE is introduced in immediate preverbal position within the main clause of the

first sentence, which makes chE eligible for selection as fronted topic in the last sentence.

1d. 50/60 la:kh tukaa: chE *wAA* dana.

In proposing this substitute I was interested in looking at the discourse consequences of placing the actor immediately before the final verb. This sentence was also rejected as a possible initial sentence for a discourse. Stressed wAA in preverbal position, while not appropriate here, would be acceptable in a context in which two people are competing to build an expensive house and in which the one referred to as wAA ended up being the only one to succeed. Sentence (1d) might then be glossed: 'Spending five or six million, he alone managed to build a house.'

Sentence (1c) did not work as a text-initial sentence because the lack of prior mention made it unacceptable to select chE as the marked sentence-initial topic. Sentence (1d) did not work as a text-initial sentence because the lack of prior mention made it unacceptable to place wAA in stressed, contrastive preverbal position. Without a point of reference no contrast or comparison can be meaningfully stated.

4.2 *Choice of Theme and Segmentation*

In addition to exploring the consequences of alternative word order, one can also inquire about the consequences of including a larger or smaller number of clauses in a single sentence. Thus, one might try to explain the differences in effectiveness that exist between the original text and the following variant of that text:

1e. 50/60 la:kh tukala. wAA chE dana.

In the original version, 50/60 la:kh tukaa: was placed in prominence by virtue of its position as the initial constituent of the sentence. (Sentence-initial constituents of this sort are what Halliday would refer to as the sentence *THEME* by contrast with the remainder of the sentence, which he would call the *RHEME*.) As a nonfinal clause it is unmarked for tense and thus it shares semantically in the tense of the final verb, dana. Within this close-knit nexus of nonfinal clause plus final clause, it was possible to highlight the sum of money, 50/60 la:kh by postponing the introduction of both wAA and chE until the following final clause. This also provided the syntactic means for the subtle interplay between clauses whereby the focused theme expressed by the stripped down nonfinal clause is understood as a highlighted comment on the actor.

By breaking the original into two sentences as in (1e) much of this is lost. The close nexus between clauses is no longer syntactically expressed and nothing has been done to compensate for what has been lost. It is, for example, no longer clear who it was that spent the money or what it was the money was spent for. The clause 50/60 la:kh tukala is no longer a sentence-initial constituent. There are now two sentence-initial constituents, 50/60 la:kh and wAA. Not only has the original sentence-initial theme been lost, there seems to be no thematic cohesion between the two sentences in example (1e). That is, there is nothing overtly expressed in the first sentence of (1e) that is picked up on as old information by the second.

Complex sentence structure provides an elegant means not only for cohesively linking sentence

constituents, but also for setting the stage for longer stretches of discourse. The way clauses are combined in the first sentence of the original text provides a clue that the reader is to expect that what follows will be mainly about the actor. If these clauses had been combined in the following way, the reader would have been set to expect that what followed would have been about the rest of the actor's money and how he spent it.

1f. 50/60 la:kh wAA chE daneta phukala. 'He spent five or six million to build a house.'

Here 50/60 la:kh is a sentence-initial theme which is also the object of the main verb. What was the non-final clause in the original text has been replaced here with a final clause, and what was the final clause in the original has become an embedded purpose clause. The difference in the way the clauses are combined triggers quite a difference in the expectations of the reader as to what is to follow.

5. Sentence 2

5.1 *Choice of Theme and Complex Embedding in a Non-event Sentence.*

If our observations to this point have been correct, we have seen that the first sentence in a text of this sort plays a rather pivotal role in the discourse. The form of the initial sentence of this text is compatible with certain reader expectations: 1) that the text will be a participant-oriented discourse rather than an event-oriented one, and 2) that the main topic of the text will be the person, not the house. These expectations follow from the fact that the main participant, wAA and the main prop, chE are first mentioned in the final clause, thus putting the non-final clause in focus as a characterization of the main participant. Syntactic prominence is given to a clause which, from a semantic point of view, acts as a description of the main participant. If the writer had wished to trigger different expectations in his readers he would have used a different ordering of sentence constituents and might even have combined the clauses quite differently.

The first sentence is context for the second sentence. The first sentence has placed two items "on stage" as it were: a (rich) man, and his house. Either of these would be eligible for selection as the sentence-initial focused theme of the second sentence. As it turns out the house is selected as theme, but it is selected not in the unmarked (absolutive) form which might have been expected in a full-fledged focused topic, but rather in the locative.

2. wa chEE wAA thaa cwaneta la:yek mata:la. 'He didn't feel it right to live in that house himself.'

Sentence 2 is the one non-event in this parable. As such it belongs in a very general way to what we might call background, and as is often the case in narrative genre, backgrounds and settings have greater syntactic complexity and greater depth of embedding than do events.

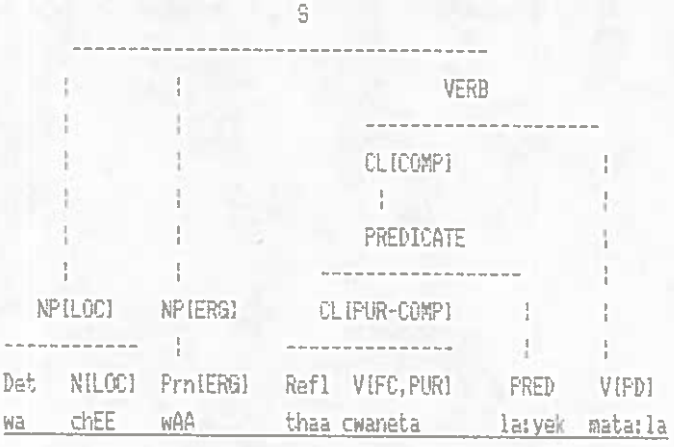
The locative, wa chEE 'in that house,' is (in Halliday's terms) the THEME. It refers to a previously introduced prop, which as given information provides a starting point from which the predication proceeds in the direction of new information. As a THEME it may be said to relate to the entire sentence. As a LOCATION, however, wa chEE relates only to the cwaneta clause. It was living that was to take place in that house, not the feeling of inappropriateness that drove the actor to live

elsewhere. Its scope as a locative is at most thaa cwaneta, even though its scope as THEME would be the remainder of the sentence, the RHEME, if my understanding of Halliday is correct.

This sentence provides an example in which complement structure runs rampant. The final verb, mata:la 'did not feel' is what I would take to be the superordinate or main verb both syntactially and semantically. This verb takes as its complement la:yek 'right, appropriate, suitable' to yield la:yek mata:la which I would gloss 'did not feel it appropriate'. la:yek in turn takes a projected 'purpose' complement ('purpose' is very loosely used here--I'd gladly accept suggestions for a better term), thaa cwaneta 'to live there himself.' So as I understand the structure of this there is a complement embedded within a complement. None of this complement material relates to its respective verb in terms of any kind of role relation. Rather, the complement simply completes the semantic content of the predication initiated by the dominant verb. [Like the English, paint white in 'He painted the fence white.']

One ought to draw a diagram if one makes this kind of claim, but I can't do that until I have dealt with the question of how wAA fits into this structure. It seems clear that cwane 'reside' does not take an ergative actor. The reflexive, thaa stands in construction with wAA and is not directly an argument of any verb. The verb mata:la is what governs the ergative wAA in this instance. This in itself seems significant, since feeling can be quite involuntary, not requiring the ergative. Verbs that normally take ergative actors allow the replacement of the ergative with a genitive when the actor is portrayed primarily as an experiencer. Here the experiencer seems to be portrayed as one who plays a volitional role in making a decision. If that is indeed what is going on, then the participant that is getting characterized in this parable is here being made responsible for a choice. This is quite congruent with what I take to be the force of the parable as a whole.

If this holds, then the relations discussed will not all get represented in any simple diagram. The locative, wa chEE should be grouped on semantic grounds with thaa cwaneta. The referent of wAA covers for the (absolutive) actor of cwaneta, and the reflexive antecedant of thaa, but encodes overtly only the (ergative) actor of mata:la. The overt form, then should be grouped with mata:la, not with cwaneta. I suspect that the best we can do in representing the surface structure of (2) is something like the following:



Which really does not provide an adequate picture of all that is going on here.

Looking at this from a discourse perspective we might ask what makes this kind of complexity effective in this kind of context. Putting wa chEE in initial position can be viewed as thematic cohesion. The house gets introduced in (1) and here it is picked up as the point of departure. It is also the take-off point for sentence (3). The entire parable can be viewed in terms of the interplay between the actor and the house (or its surrogate, the room). Through this interplay we learn something of significance about the actor, which is the point of the whole parable. By preposing wa chEE the thematic status of the prop is marked. In this sentence wAA is probably in its normal position, since we would not expect the ergative actor to be interposed between the main verb and its embedded complements. The left dislocation of wa chEE may be the only deviation from unmarked word order that we would be able to identify here, a situation that certainly makes sense in terms of thematic cohesion, since it was the choice of wa chEE as theme that explains its appearance in sentence-initial position.

5.2 *The Effect of Alternative Theme Choices.*

We may pursue our experiment in syntax and discourse further by asking what difference it would have made if a different sentence-initial THEME had been chosen in sentence (2).

	THEME	RHEME
2.	wa chEE	wAA thaa cwaneta la:yak mata:la.
2a.	wAA	wa chEE thaa cwaneta la:yek mata:la.
2b.	thaa cwaneta	wAA wa chEE la:yek matala.

Example (2) is from the original text.

Example (2a) differs from the original in choosing wAA as theme rather than wa chEE. Since both the actor and the house are introduced in the first sentence, this is acceptable as a continuation of the story. The difference between the two is subtle. Selecting the house as the theme of the second sentence has the effect of focusing attention upon the house (and its cost) as the starting point of the second sentence. The alternative choice of wAA as theme forces a different perspective by starting immediately with the actor and his decision. By giving the reader a second glance at the extravagant house before moving to the actor's decision, the original text gives the reader a better first-hand involvement with the facts. By choosing wAA as theme the reader is immediately confronted with actor and his decision. The extravagance of the house that triggers that decision is no longer the link to the preceding context. Variant (2a) seems therefore less effective in this context.

Example (2b) differs from the original in choosing thaa cwaneta as theme rather than wa chEE. This variant fits the context well and does not change the impact of the story in any essential way. thaa cwaneta has the same kind of linking function to the theme of the first sentence as did wa chEE in the original. Both allow the reader a second glance at the house and its cost before moving the story ahead to the actor's decition.

3.4 *The Effect of some Secondary Changes in Word Order.*

The simple fronting of a theme seems fairly unproblematic so far as the acceptability of a sentence is concerned. Once the theme has been fronted, however, other permutations are more troublesome.

	THEME	RHEME
2c.	thaa cwaneta	wa chEE wAA la:yak mata:la.
2d.	wAA	thaata wa chEE cwaneta la:yak mata:la.

Example (2c) differs from (2b) in that wAA is moved to immediate preverbal position. We may view this variant as the result of two permutations, one in which thaa cwaneta is chosen as THEME, and one in which wAA is chosen as a marked preverbal constituent. Moving wAA to preverbal position in the second clause of Sentence (1) demanded a context in which wAA was contrasted with some other participant already on stage. The implied contrast is confusing in this context, and this variant is judged as not effective in this context.

Example (2d) is a patched-up version of the ungrammatical *wAA thaa wa chEE cwaneta la:yak mata:la. Moving thaa out of the cwaneta clause forces it into construction with la:yak mata:la, hence the change from unmarked to dative. The resultant difference in meaning effects a considerable change in entire story. Not only does (2d) move immediately to the feelings of the actor without giving the reader a second glance at the house, it portrays the actor as one who feels *unworthy* to live in such a house. His his feelings of inferiority are given greater prominence than the house.

6. Sentence 3

3. chE chakhAA: bideshiitaeta ba:lAA bila. 'He rented the whole house out to foreigners.'

By this time the actor has been so well introduced that he needs no further mention. This leaves basically two choices for THEME. The choice of chE chakhAA: is perfect, providing thematic continuity with the first two sentences, whereas bideshiitaeta could hardly have been chosen since there has been no previous mention of them. The choice of bideshiitaeta as an immediate preverbal constituent, even though forced by the choice of THEME, is also very nice, since this participant group stands in constrast with the actor as the ones who eventually inhabit the house.

7. Sentence 4

4. thaa chakuu kwatha: ba:lAA kayaa: cwAAwana. 'As for himself, he rented a room [somewhere else] and went to live there.'

With thaa as THEME, the actor is brought into sentence-initial prominence for the first time. In this context thaa is highly cohesive, highlighting the contrast between the actor and the foreigners of Sentence (3). The builder is focused on as dealing with foreigners in one way and with himself in quite another way. The reflexive thaa in thematic position provides a neat pivot which strengthens the implicit contrast that caps the irony of the parable.

The same individual could have been referred to in more than one way. Instead of thaa the author could have chosen either wa, thamhAA or wAA. If either wAA or thamhAA had been chosen it would have made ba:lAA kayaa: the more salient of the two verbs, where from context it seems that the choice of unmarked form which points to cwAAwana as the more important form is preferable. The choice of either wa or wAA instead of the reflexive would have failed to highlight the contrast between the actor and the foreigners as effectively as the original text.

chakuu kwatha: surfaces as the absolutive direct object of ba:lAA kayaa: but it is referentially identical to the locative site of cwAAwana. cwAA functions as purpose complement to wana. In this case orthographic conventions actually present the two as constituting a single word.

The linguistic study of beautiful little gems of discourse such as this is a source of great pleasure. The structure of this piece seems tight and beautifully crafted. Each word is significant, each choice of sentence structure is made with a view to the ultimate impact of the entire discourse. While realizing only in part the extent of my ignorance, I am thankful for every opportunity to learn at the feet of those are masters of the language. I look forward to the time when the relatively *ad hoc* comments made here can be converted into reasonably well stated regularities.